

PBS MACNEIL/LEHRER NEWSHOUR

24 May 1984

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CONTRAS

MACNEIL: In the House of Representatives, the new willingness to support El Salvador and its new president Jose Napoleon Duarte, did not extend to covert aid for the contras in Nicaragua. That produced another spirited debate.

REP.\ROBERT\MICHEL (R-Ill., House minority leader): If we abandon the contras today, whose turn will it be tomorrow? Korea, Israel or any number of others we could name? It is geostrategically wrong. The Moscow-Havana-Managua axis wants nothing more than to see the Sandinistas gain a victory by default. This will only whet their appetite for more adventurism. And it's diplomatically wrong. We'll lose whatever leverage we have with the Sandinistas if we turn away from the contras. And finally, and most important, it's morally wrong to cut off funds. What kind of moral foreign policy is it that suddenly cuts off aid to those we have urged to fight tyranny?

REP.\MICHAEL\BARNES (D-Md.): There are ways to do it that are lawful. There are ways to do it that are overt. There are ways to do it that are consistent with the values of our nation. We are a signatory to the Rio treaty. We are a member of the Organization of American States. They provide mechanisms for the international community to deal with this kind of problem. It is not the answer for the United States unilaterally to hire a lot of guerrillas and send them off to invade another country.

REP.\WILLIAM\BROOMFIELD (R-Mich.): Throughout history, of this House, there have been moments that not only decide issues but that define the character of this body, then this is the one. We stand before history and the American people and, yes, the world. And what we decide will say as much about us as it does about the contras. We don't let down our friends. That's a basic truth of the American character. Are we going to forget that truth?

REP.\JIM\WRIGHT (D-Texas, House majority leader): Do we have any right to invade and violate the territorial integrity of the government of Nicaragua? Do we have a right to dictate to them? I think this is a test of what our role is in this hemisphere. And throughout the hemisphere, friends are looking. Do we regard ourselves as the good neighbor, or do we regard ourselves as the hemispheric bully, with the right to dictate to others under pain of our financing someone else in a subterranean way to shed their blood to bring down their government if they don't agree with us?

MACNEIL: After that debate, the House went on to vote against the \$21 million covert aid package by 241 votes to 177. The bill will now go back to the Republican-controlled Senate, which will have to decide whether to insist on the aid to the contras or go along with the House.